OPINION

OUR VIEW

PLUS 1 CITY BENEFITS

The group Citizens Project wants the Colorado Springs City Council to approve "plus one" health coverage. It would allow each city employee to extend health insurance coverage to one other adult, including a same-sex partner. Today, each employee may extend coverage only to a lawful spouse or dependent children. The proposal could become a divisive "gay rights" issue. It is no such thing. It is an employee's rights issue.

No employer, including City Hall, gives health insurance to employees. Jobs that come with health benefits are jobs in which some compensation is paid in cash and the remainder is paid as a company contribution that covers all or part of the cost of health insurance or other benefits. It isn't magic and it isn't a gift. It's compensation for work, all of it earned. How employees spend that compensation should be no more an employer's business than how employees spend their take-home pay.

Under today's system, a non-married city employee earning $50,000 in cash is paid less than a married employee earning $50,000 in cash. That's because the married employee may extend health insurance to a spouse, incurring only nominal out-of-pocket expense. The non-married employee can't share the policy with another adult, meaning the employer is telling certain employees how they can and cannot spend what they rightfully earn.

The Citizens Project proposal couldn't come at a better time, as the recession means city employees will likely go at least another year without raises. This would be a raise for unmarried employees, at least, which would come at no substantial cost. Yes, it would increase the number of people covered by the city's health insurance program. But budget analysts believe the cost would be offset by the reduced number of uninsured visiting city-owned emergency rooms.

Please, leave the noise, emotion and hyperbole out of this proposal. It's a common-sense issue of compensation fairness, and nothing more.

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